



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA

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The Rt. Rev. Charles E. Bennison, Jr.
Bishop Diocesan

LETTER TO THE 736 BISHOPS OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

July 30, 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I am writing to you and every bishop in the Anglican Communion in order to explain the reasons for the inhibition of the Rev. Dr. David Moyer, a priest of this diocese and the rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Rosemont, Pennsylvania, USA.

Because Fr. Moyer is president of Forward-in-Faith/North America, a so-called "traditionalist" organization, and because he and I differ in our approaches to the place of women and homosexual persons in the church, as well as on other theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral questions, some in the media have erroneously depicted my inhibition of him as prejudicial with regard to those of a conservative theological persuasion and their place in the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. My aim is to create in our diocese a tolerant, inclusive, diverse community consonant with the core identity Christ has given all of us in baptism and honoring both so-called "conservative" and "liberal" views. Nonetheless, media coverage of our differences, unfortunately, has become so widespread as to make our internal, diocesan disciplinary issue iconic of the contest between "conservatives" and "liberals" throughout the Anglican Communion, a reality warranting and occasioning my writing to you.

Let me begin by outlining the background to our disciplinary action. Acting in accord with the canons of the Episcopal Church, the Standing Committee of this diocese, constituted by five clergy and five laity elected by the clergy of the diocese and lay representatives from our 162 parishes, last February sent to me in writing its determination that Fr. Moyer had abandoned the Communion of this church by an open renunciation of the Discipline of this Church through his breach of, among others, the canons listed in the enclosed copy of our Chancellors' Report to the Standing Committee. As documented in the Report, Fr. Moyer's behavior has clearly constituted a breach of the Discipline of the Church, disobedience of his ordination vows, and his abandonment of Communion. Before you come to any judgment regarding this situation, I urge you to read the Standing Committee Report thoroughly.

Please know that while prompted by Fr. Moyer's recent schismatic act of becoming a nominee for election as a so-called "bishop" by the Forward-in-Faith/North America organization, the Standing Committee's action came in response to his past and present canonical offenses.

Please also recognize that while in some parts of the Anglican Communion Fr. Moyer's actions would not have violated the canons, it is quite clear that his actions reflect a repeated failure to abide by the canons of THIS part of the Communion. Bishops in the Episcopal Church are obliged to visit their parishes not less than every three years in order to preach, celebrate the Eucharist, preside at baptism and confirmation, and examine the life of the clergy and congregation. Our canons relative to the bishop read:

Canon III.24.4(a): Each Diocesan Bishop shall visit the Congregations within the Diocese at least once in three years. Interim visits may be delegated to another Bishop of this Church.

Canon III.24.4(b): At every visitation, the visiting Bishop shall preside at the Holy Eucharist and at the Initiatory Rites, as required, preach the Word, examine the records of the Congregation required by Canon III.14.3 and examine the life and ministry of the Clergy and Congregation according to Canon III.14.2(e).

Our canons relative to the rector and the congregation read:

Canon I.13.1: Every Congregation of this Church shall belong to the Church in the Diocese in which its place of worship is situated.

Canon III.14.1(a): The authority of and responsibility for the conduct of the worship and the spiritual jurisdiction of the parish are vested in the Rector, subject to the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, the constitution and Canons of the Church, and the pastoral direction of the Bishop.

Canon III.14.2(d): It shall be [the] duty [of the Clergy in charge of a cure of souls] to encourage and prepare persons for Confirmation, Reception, and the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Vows, and to be ready to present them to the Bishop with a list of their names.

Canon III.14.2(e): On notice being received of the Bishop's intention to visit any Congregation, the Clergy shall announce the fact to the Congregation. At every visitation it shall be their duty and that of the Wardens, Vestry or other officers to exhibit to the Bishop the Parish Register and to give information on the state of the Congregation, spiritual and temporal, in such categories as the Bishop shall have previously requested in writing.

The above provisions make clear that the Diocesan Bishop, Clergy and officers of a parish all have duties to perform, and that the Clergy have a duty to present confirmands to "the" Bishop of the Diocese in which the Congregation is located, not to just any Bishop.

This does not mean that what has come to be known as "supplemental pastoral care" is impermissible. Indeed, the very concept originated in this diocese, as early as 1994. Consistent with the General Convention Canons, the Book of Common Prayer, a resolution adopted by our 1994 Diocesan Convention, and the Covenant of our House of Bishops drafted last March in Texas, I am temporarily willing to permit visiting bishops to serve parishes as long as:

- a. The parish recognizes my authority as the Bishop of this Diocese and hospitably welcomes me for full visitations more frequently than they do other bishops.
- b. The parish pays its required assessments and the amount asked of it for the financial support of the mission of the diocese.
- c. The parish participates in the life of the Diocese through attendance at Convention, sending representatives to deanery meetings, etc.
- d. The parish agrees to receive the Pennsylvania Episcopalian and Episcopal Life, so that its people may learn what is going on not only in this diocese but in the wider church.

In summary, therefore, although they may see themselves still part of the church, in the Episcopal Church clergy who consider themselves "out of communion" with their diocesan bishop and refuse to permit canonically-required episcopal visitations have in fact fallen into schism and abandoned the communion of the church. At the heart of our understanding of the church is the requirement that congregations be members of the diocese in which they are located, and be in communion with the diocesan bishop in order to be in communion with the diocese and the larger church. In the Episcopal Church, we uphold the structures of our church to maintain our unity, and we hold one another accountable for the same. As reported by the Standing Committee here, for at least ten years Fr. Moyer has resisted efforts by both my predecessor and me to make a full visitation to his parish and to be held accountable.

When, at his own request, Fr. Moyer appeared before the Standing Committee, in my absence, on February 26, he gave a "litany" of what he considered errors on my part. When asked what I must do before he would allow me to visit, he stated, "Repent." When asked what he was prepared to do to ease the situation, he said he really had not thought of anything. Since the Standing Committee acted and I inhibited FR. Moyer, he has not denied any of the acts referred to. More importantly, he has made no appeal to the Standing Committee or me to ask what he must do to "retract" his renunciation. His only actions have been to appeal to others outside the Diocese, and to sue the Diocese and me in court, which itself is a clear violation of Canon IV.14.2, and one further indication that he cares nothing about the law of the Church (at the time of this writing the Court has already dismissed five of the seven "counts" in the suit).

In response to another question some have asked, please know that the Standing Committee could have relied upon any of several canonical options in beginning a disciplinary process for Fr. Moyer. That it chose to declare his having abandoned the Communion of the Church is consistent with the kind of patience we have sought to exercise in dealing with the Church of the Good Shepherd, because the canon allows Fr. Moyer six months to reverse his actions.

When I received the Standing Committee's statement of the acts by Fr. Moyer on the basis of which it had declared him to have abandoned the Discipline, and therefore the Communion, of the Church, as required by our canons I subsequently affirmed the Committee's determination and on March 1 inhibited Fr. Moyer from officiating in the Diocese for six months, beginning March 4. In order that the Inhibition can expire and I can avoid the canonical duty of releasing Fr. Moyer from his obligations as a priest, I sincerely hope is that within the six-month period he will transmit to me a written statement of a good-faith retraction of the acts described in the Report and:

- a. Acknowledge that his disagreements with the Bishops of this Diocese do not justify his disobedience of the canons and his refusal to allow my predecessor and me to celebrate, preach and confirm at Good Shepherd for the past decade.
- b. Agree that the next time he is notified that a Bishop of this Diocese intends to visit, celebrate, preach and confirm, he will welcome the Diocesan Bishop.
- c. Disassociate himself from the efforts of FIF-NA to consecrate a bishop in violation of the Canons of the Church.
- d. Withdraw his civil law suit against the Bishop and the Diocese.

Finally, it is important that you understand that my teaching, the misleading characterization of it by the media notwithstanding, is consistent with beliefs and practices of the Episcopal Church.

- a. The Episcopal Church is governed by a Constitution and Canons which among other things require the use of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. That Book states on page 14 that in certain services "...the contemporary idiom may be conformed to traditional language." Good Shepherd Rosemont has followed this rubric in producing its Anglican Service Book and, while it is NOT the 1928 Prayer Book, I have supported the parish's use of it.
- b. The Episcopal Church has not imposed sanctions on bishops who have ordained persons who are living in long term committed relationships with another of the same sex. Nor has any disciplinary action been taken against priests who have performed ceremonies blessing such relationships. At the same time, no action has been taken to condemn those who think that such relationships deserve the same condemnation as sexual promiscuity of any kind deserves. This is consistent with my own approach.
- c. The Episcopal Church as an institution recognizes the validity of the ordination of women as deacons, priests and bishops. The Episcopal Church accepts the fact that there are those who would prefer to worship with a male in the officiating role and, I have never forced any parish in this diocese to accept a woman over the objections of the vestry or parish.
- d. The Episcopal Church allows bishops, priests, deacons and laity alike to differ on the interpretation of Scripture and certain fundamental issues of theology. A bishop cannot compel members of the Church to hold as true that particular words have the meaning and only the meaning he ascribes to them, and the same is true of the laity: they cannot insist that a priest or bishop hold as true that particular words have the meaning and only the meaning the laity ascribe to them. For example, good Episcopalians, and good Anglicans for that matter, can say they believe in the Resurrection and yet have in mind different meanings for that statement of faith. This has been my own approach.
- e. Please feel free to contact any member of the Standing Committee or me if you have questions, comments, or suggestions regarding this painful situation in our common life as a church. I ask for your prayers for us all in the midst of this difficult time of trial.

Thank you for your patience in reading this letter, for your interest and concern for this matter, and for our common work for the sake of Christ and his church. Please feel free to contact any member of our Standing Committee, our chancellors, or me if you have questions, comments, or suggestions regarding this painful situation in our common life as a diocese. I ask for your understanding and your prayers for us all, including the clergy and people of the Church of the Good Shepherd, during this difficult time.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Charles".

Charles E. Bennison, Jr.